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Regional confidence-building measures: activities of the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa

Report of the Secretary-General**

Summary

During the period under review, the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa held only one ministerial meeting. At the conclusion of its meeting, the Committee adopted two declarations: one on the mercenary activity in Central Africa and the other on peace, security, democracy and development in the Great Lakes region. By the declaration on mercenaries, the Committee noted that the mercenary activity which had taken root in the subregion a long time ago had become a serious obstacle to peace, stability and development in the subregion. By the Declaration of the International Conference, the Committee, inter alia, welcomed the progress made at the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, in particular the successful convening of the first summit of Heads of State in Dar es Salaam in November 2004, and encouraged its member States to consider the existing legal instruments in the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS). The Department for Disarmament Affairs and its Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa, the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region and the United Nations Subregional Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Central Africa continued to extend assistance to the Member States of the Committee.

* A/60/150.

** The document was submitted late to conference services without the explanation required under paragraph 8 of General Assembly resolution 53/208 B, by which the Assembly decided that, if a report is submitted late, the reason should be included in a footnote to the document.

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Contents

		Para.
I.	Introduction	
II.	Action by the United Nations	
III.	Meeting of the Standing Advisory Committee	
IV.	Programme of activities for the period 2005-2006	
V.	Administrative and financial matters	
VI.	Conclusions and observations	

graphs Page
1–3 3
4–11 3
12–16 5
17 6
18–19 6
20–21 7

I. Introduction

1. In its resolution 59/96 of 3 December 2004, entitled "Regional confidence-building measures: activities of the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa", the General Assembly, inter alia, reaffirmed its support for efforts aimed at promoting confidence-building measures at the regional and subregional levels in order to ease tensions and conflicts in Central Africa and to further peace, stability and sustainable development in the subregion. It also reaffirmed its support for the programme of work of the Standing Advisory Committee adopted at the organizational meeting of the Committee, held in Yaoundé in July 1992 (see A/47/511).

2. By the same resolution, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General, pursuant to Security Council resolution 1197 (1998), to provide the States members of the Committee with the necessary support for the implementation and smooth functioning of the Council for Peace and Security in Central Africa (COPAX), created in 1999 by the Heads of State and Government of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) and the early warning mechanism in Central Africa. The Assembly also requested the Secretary-General to continue to provide the States members of the Committee with assistance to ensure that they are able to carry out their efforts and further requested him to submit to it at its sixtieth session a report on the implementation of the resolution.

3. The present report is submitted pursuant to that request. It covers the activities undertaken by the United Nations and the Committee since the submission of the previous report on the subject (A/59/182).

II. Action by the United Nations

4. During the period under review, in response to a request from the Government of Burundi for assistance in addressing the problem of illegally held small arms and light weapons in the hands of the civilian population, the Department for Disarmament Affairs dispatched a fact-finding mission to Burundi. The Mission, which was jointly conducted with the Geneva-based UNDP Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery, took place from 19 to 25 February 2005.

5. Following extensive consultations with several Government officials, members of the donor community, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and other representatives of the United Nations system in Burundi, as well as representatives of NGOs and civil society organizations, the Mission concluded that the proliferation of illicit weapons in the country was a serious and widespread problem caused by a combination of political, socio-economic and security factors, and that it was a problem that equally affected the neighbouring States of Burundi. The Mission was also informed by all concerned that, due to the fragile security situation in the country and, in particular, the inability of the Transitional Government to provide security for all its citizens, it would be difficult to undertake any weapons-collection programmes on the eve of the presidential elections.

6. On 4 May 2005, President Ndayizeye signed into law a civilian disarmament decree strengthening the country's efforts to reduce the number of weapons retained in private homes across the country. The decree was complemented by the signing of separate legislation prohibiting off-duty police and military personnel from

wearing uniforms or bearing arms during the electoral period (see S/2005/328). Since the signing of the decree, the UNDP country office in Burundi has appointed a small arms expert to assist with the country's disarmament initiatives, provide advice and coordinate international community assistance in this regard.

7. In other developments in the region, from 11 to 20 May 2005, the Director of the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa and the Coordinator of the Centre's project on small arms transparency and control regime in Africa (SATCRA) undertook a mission to Cameroon (1 to 15 May) and to Gabon (15 to 20 May). The objective of the mission was to launch the national inventory of local capacities for the production of small arms and light weapons and ammunition.

8. In addition to the activities undertaken by the Department for Disarmament Affairs, the Subregional Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Central Africa, which was created at the behest of the Committee, continued to provide technical assistance to member States of the Committee and the secretariat of the Economic Community of Central African States. In keeping with the established spirit of collaboration with the ECCAS secretariat, the Centre has continued to provide support in the design of a legal framework for information management concerning the freedom of movement of citizens of the subregion. Furthermore, in commemoration of the fifty-sixth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights on 10 December 2004, the Subregional Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Central Africa organized, in collaboration with the office of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization in Central Africa, several activities, which took place from 3 to 22 December 2004. The activities included, among others, extracurricular arts activities, such as imaginative drawings full of colour and sensitivity on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child; the projection of a film video entitled "Human rights progress and challenge" and an OHCHR DVD entitled "The pain of others, at work for the United Nations Commission on Human Rights"; training in Internet use for human rights work; the launching of the Sergio Vieira de Mello Human Rights Prize; exhibitions on human rights education; and a training seminar on human rights and the culture of peace.

9. From 27 to 29 June 2005, the Subregional Centre, in collaboration with UNAIDS and the Government of the Republic of Rwanda, conducted a capacity-building workshop for civil society representatives of all ECCAS member States on the subject "The role of civil society in the fight against discrimination and stigmatization of people living with HIV/AIDS." The seminar concluded with the adoption of a declaration and a code of conduct, as well as the establishment of a network of HIV/AIDS activists in the subregion.

10. The Subregional Centre also provided financial assistance to two institutions of higher learning in the field of human rights. The Association pour la promotion des droits de l'homme en Afrique Centrale based in Yaoundé, and the Faculté de Droit de l'Université Marien Ngouabi, based in Brazzaville were selected as beneficiaries of a US$ 3,000 allowance aimed at supporting their respective programmes in human rights education. Furthermore, within the framework of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Assisting Communities Together, the Subregional Centre, on behalf of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, awarded allowances of US$ 5,000 to three Cameroonian NGOs working in the field of human rights and peace advocacy. They

are the Mbororo Social and Cultural Development Association, which operates in the north-west province of Cameroon, the Centre for Human Rights and Peace Advocacy, based in Bamenda, Cameroon, and the Union Nationale des Associations et Institutions pour Personnes Handicapées du Cameroun, based in Yaoundé.

11. After more than 10 years of preparations by the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes region, the International Conference on Peace, Security, Democracy and Development in the Great Lakes Region was finally held in Dar es Salaam, on 19 and 20 November 2004. The Conference, which included six member States of the Committee, culminated in the adoption of the Dar es Salaam Declaration on Peace, Security, Democracy and Development in the Great Lakes Region, by which participating States committed themselves, inter alia, to building a Great Lakes region that is open to other regions of the continent by developing cooperation in priority areas such as peace and security; democracy and good governance; economic development and regional integration; and humanitarian and social issues.

III. Meeting of the Standing Advisory Committee

12. The Committee held its 22nd ministerial meeting from 14 to 18 March 2005 in Brazzaville (see A/59/769-S/2005/212). Its agenda included, among other things, (a) recent geopolitical and security developments in selected member States of the Committee including, Burundi, the Central African Republic, Chad, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the situation between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda and a brief exchange of experiences in the implementation of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes in various member States of the Committee; (b) the threat of the phenomenon of mercenaries in the Central African region; (c) the role of the Committee and the Economic Community of Central African States in promoting the implementation, in the Central African region, of the Dar es Salaam Declaration on Peace, Security, Democracy and Development in the Great Lakes Region; and (d) the contribution of Central African States to the work of the United Nations Second Biennial Meeting of States to Consider the Implementation of the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects.

13. All 11 member States of the Committee participated in this meeting, namely, Angola, Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Rwanda and Sao Tome and Principe.

14. Participants welcomed the holding, on 28 February in Burundi, of a peaceful referendum on that country's new constitution, as well as the holding, on 13 March, of peaceful presidential and parliamentary elections in the Central African Republic. They expressed grave concern about the massive inflow of refugees into Chad as a result of the Darfur conflict in the Sudan. Participants welcomed the improved relationship between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda, in particular the signing on 24 September 2004 by the two countries of the joint verification mechanism aimed at addressing the transborder problems that have been the source of conflict between them, including the former armed forces of Rwanda, the Interahamwe, who are still present in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. They deplored the killings that are still going on in the eastern Democratic Republic

of the Congo and called upon all Congolese entities to take the necessary steps to overcome the mistrust that hitherto has been one of the major obstacles to a truly unified country.

15. At the conclusion of its 22nd ministerial meeting, the Committee adopted a declaration on the International Conference on Peace and Security, Democracy and Development in the Great Lakes Region, aimed at promoting the implementation, in the Central African region, of the Dar es Salaam Declaration in the Great Lakes region. In that connection, the Committee called upon ECCAS member States to take into account existing ECCAS judicial instruments and to broaden their application, in particular the non-aggression pacts and mutual assistance pacts. The Committee also adopted a declaration on mercenary activity in the Central African region, by which it noted that the mercenary activity that had taken root in the subregion a long time ago had become a serious obstacle to peace, stability and development in the subregion. In that connection, the Committee invited member States to increase exchange of information and to adopt appropriate legislation to combat mercenary activity. The Committee also requested member States to take concrete measures through effective cooperation among all States of the subregion, which, once adopted, would combat mercenary activity in Central Africa (see A/59/769-S/2005/212).

16. Committee efforts to organize the training workshop to enable Central African civil society and NGOs to play a meaningful role in the implementation, in the Central African region, of the United Nations Programme of Action to Prevent, Eradicate and Combat the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects, an item on its agenda since May 2003, did not materialize due to financial constraints. As at May 2005, the Committee had received a contribution of US$ 37,000 from the Government of the Czech Republic in support of the workshop.

IV. Programme of activities for the period 2005-2006

17. The Committee programme of activities for the period 2005-2006 will be elaborated at its 23rd ministerial meeting to be held from 29 August to 2 September 2005 in Brazzaville.

V. Administrative and financial matters

18. During the period under review, the General Assembly continued to provide funding from the regular budget for two ministerial meetings, while the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights continued to finance the activities of the United Nations Subregional Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Central Africa. As indicated above, the Government of the Czech Republic contributed US$ 37,000 towards the organization of the capacity-training workshop for Central African civil society organizations and NGOs. The Committee hopes that other Governments will follow the example of the Government of the Czech Republic in funding similar events.

19. The Secretary-General reiterates his appeal to Member States, intergovernmental, governmental and non-governmental organizations to contribute

to the Trust Fund of the Committee in order to enable the Committee to fully implement its programme of work.

VI. Conclusions and observations

20. Although the Committee was able to organize one meeting only, the adoption of the two declarations, mentioned above, once again demonstrated the valuable role the Committee could play in the Central African region. Indeed, the Committee remains the only forum that allows States members of ECCAS to meet on a regular basis to examine and exchange information on recent developments in the areas of peace, security and development in their respective countries and the region as a whole. Through the adoption of the Declaration on Peace, Security, Democracy and Development in the Great Lakes Region, the Members of the Committee recognize the link between peace in the Great Lakes region and their own subregion.

21. Moreover, by highlighting the activities of mercenaries in the Central African region, the Committee endeavours to draw the attention of its States members and the international community to the seriousness of the problem and therefore to the need for concerted subregional and international action to effectively address the problem. While the Committee efforts are commendable, in order for the Central African subregion to attain sustainable peace, stability and development in the subregion, concrete actions are imperative. In that connection, it is critical that COPAX and its structures, in particular its early warning mechanism, become operational. It is also vital that the capacity of the ECCAS secretariat be strengthened so as to enable it to spearhead the implementation of the various declarations, decisions and recommendations of the Committee.